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*Ministry of
Sustainable Resource
Management*

Agricultural Land Commission

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Table of Contents

Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement	3
Commission Overview	5
Resource Summary	7
Vision, Mission and Values	8
Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Results	9
Related Initiatives and Planning Processes	14





Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement

I am pleased to present the 2005/06 – 2007/08 Service Plan for the Agricultural Land Commission. The Commission consists of 19 members entrusted by the government to preserve agricultural land and to encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia. Although the Chair reports to me, the Commission operates with a high degree of independence within the framework of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*.

This year's Service Plan for the Commission renews its focus on the preservation of British Columbia's limited agricultural land base. The Commission strives to make the most effective use of the tools it has for this purpose, including managing land use changes within the Agricultural Land Reserve and reviewing plans and policies of others that impact on the Reserve. To maximize its effectiveness, the Commission does not work in isolation but invests in maintaining and strengthening its relationships with partners and stakeholders including local governments, ministries, public agencies, land owners and First Nations.

Over the past year, the Commission has made a significant effort to focus resources on agricultural land preservation and to position itself to deal with the challenges ahead. The Commission recently concluded its role in the regulation of private forest land, which is now managed by an industry/government partnership. Government and the Commission have implemented a process to enable First Nations involved in treaty negotiation processes to make applications to the Commission.

A land base reserved for farming is key to growing the agricultural sector and to providing a safe and secure food supply. I anticipate that the Commission will continue to play the lead role in agricultural land preservation and to make positive contributions to the government's goals of safe, healthy communities, a sustainable environment and a strong and vibrant provincial economy.

The 2005/06 – 2007/08 Agricultural Land Commission Service Plan was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*.

I am responsible for the basis on which the plan has been prepared. All material fiscal assumptions and policy decisions as of January 31, 2005 have been considered in preparing the plan and I am accountable for achieving the specific objectives in the plan.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "George Abbott".

Honourable George Abbott
Minister of Sustainable Resource Management

February 3, 2005



Commission Overview

The Agricultural Land Commission is the provincial agency responsible for administering the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The purposes of the Commission are:

- (a) to preserve agricultural land;
- (b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and
- (c) to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* sets out processes for land use approvals including the inclusion or removal of land from the ALR and non-farm uses and subdivisions of land within the ALR. The *Act* is supported by the Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation, which details procedures for applications and defines permitted land uses and land subdivisions within the ALR.

The *Act* is administered by a government-appointed Commission consisting of 19 members including a Chair and six panels for six geographical regions of the province. Each panel has three members including a Vice-Chair. The Commission is supported by a staff of 20 full time equivalent employees (FTEs).

The business of the Commission is carried out through three functional areas:

Land Use Planning and Application Processing

The Commission reviews and decides applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and enforces compliance with the *Act* and regulations. In addition to deciding land use applications under the *Act*, the Commission reviews plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation. The Commission works with many stakeholders including individuals, farm organizations, local governments and First Nations to support farm development and to remove unnecessary obstacles to farm expansion in their areas.

Strategic Planning and Corporate Policy

The Commission develops strategies, plans and policies to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Service Plan. The Commission also participates in the agricultural planning and policy initiatives of other ministries, agencies and local governments.

Administration and Information Systems

The above two functions are supported by an administration, records management and information systems unit. This includes maintenance of an application database and ALR maps for the province.

Resource Summary

The Agricultural Land Commission operates under a single sub-vote of the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management as specified in the *Estimates*.

Core Business Areas	2004/05 Restated Estimates ¹	2005/06 Estimates	2006/07 Plan	2007/08 Plan
Operating Expenses (\$000)				
Total	1,957	2,068	2,087	2,087
Full-time Equivalents (Direct FTEs)				
Total	20	21	21	21
Commission Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) (\$000)				
Total	50	15	15	5

¹ These amounts have been restated, for comparative purposes only, to be consistent with the presentation of the 2005/06 *Estimates*. Schedule A of the 2005/06 *Estimates*, presents a detailed reconciliation.

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A land base in British Columbia reserved for farming.

Mission

Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

Values

The Commission is committed to the following values:

- **Integration** — Policies and programs foster long-term sustainability by considering a range of economic, social and environmental values.
- **Accountability and fairness** — The Commission sets performance standards, monitors compliance and reports on progress. The Commission acts fairly and in the public interest.
- **Transparency** — The Commission establishes open processes; the bases of all decisions are public information.
- **Science and knowledge** — Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries and decisions are based on biophysical criteria, local knowledge and site specific circumstances.
- **Responsiveness** — In carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission considers the needs of farmers, landowners, applicants, First Nations, local governments and others.
- **Shared Responsibility** — The Commission strives to develop positive working relationships with local governments, First Nations and others and to ensure consultation with all stakeholders in its decisions and activities.
- **Certainty** — The Commission makes clear and timely decisions within a predictable and understandable regulatory framework.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Results

Government Strategic Goals	Agricultural Land Commission Mission Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.		
	ALC Goals	ALC Objectives	Performance Measures / Indicators
Safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.	1. Preservation of agricultural land.	→ 1. Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR.	→ Net change in total land area in the ALR (ha).
		→ 2. Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.	→ Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need.
A strong and vibrant provincial economy.	2. A land use framework that encourages and enables farming.	→ 1. Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming.	→ Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable farming.
			→ Number of local government agricultural area plans.

Goal 1: *Preservation of agricultural land.*

Agricultural land comprises less than five per cent of the total land area of British Columbia. There is ongoing pressure to convert this limited agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The Commission protects agricultural land in BC through the Agricultural Land Reserve or ALR, a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The ALR provides an agricultural land base that supports, and creates opportunities for, a safe and secure source of food and other agricultural products. The protected land base also provides for agricultural expansion and compatible economic activities.

Objective 1: *Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR.*

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides processes for landowners, local governments and First Nations to apply to the Commission to include or remove land from the ALR. The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve this objective:

- The Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR; and
- The Commission reviews the plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation.

Performance Measure:

The amount of land with capability for agriculture is finite and its location is fixed, although the suitability of agricultural land may change over time as a result of factors such as surrounding development and investment in agricultural infrastructure. The Commission, through the application process, includes or excludes land from the Reserve based on suitability for agriculture. The Commission also may exclude suitable agricultural land to meet community needs in cases where no reasonable alternatives exist.

The net change in the size of the ALR is an indicator of the stability of the agricultural land base. A relatively stable or increasing net size of the ALR indicates that lands suitable for agriculture are being retained in the ALR.

Performance Measure	2004/05 Actual/Base	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
Per cent net change in total land in the ALR.	4.75 million hectares.	< 0.1 per cent decrease over 2005/06 to 2007/08 period.		

Objective 2: Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and the Regulation permit a number of non-agricultural uses and subdivisions of land within the ALR that are considered to be compatible with agriculture. The *Act* also provides processes for landowners, local governments and First Nations to apply to the Commission for land use changes and subdivisions within the ALR that are not permitted outright by the *Act* and Regulation. The Commission employs the following strategy to achieve this objective:

- The Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that these land use changes do not diminish the suitability of lands within the ALR for agriculture.

Performance Measure:

The Commission reviews non-farm use and subdivision applications on a case-by-case basis and considers the merits of each application. An assessment of the potential impact on agricultural suitability relies heavily on the experience and judgement of the Commission. Depending on the circumstances, the Commission may give different weights to considerations such as the compatibility of the proposed use with agriculture, soil capability of the land, location and whether the proposed use would meet a pressing community need. After balancing the relevant considerations, the Commission may approve an application that it determines would not diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.

Because the specific circumstance of each application is unique, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of Commission decisions on the 4.7 million hectare ALR land base. The Commission refuses most applications that would diminish the suitability of land for agriculture while approving those applications that do not diminish the lands suitability.

Some approvals granted on the basis that they meet a pressing community need may have an impact on suitability for agriculture. A significant increase in approvals based on community need indicates the increased likelihood that the overall suitability of land for agriculture is being compromised. Note that community need is a factor in some decisions where poor agricultural suitability is also a factor. The indicator will only include decisions where community need is the primary factor in the decision.

Indicator	2004/05 Target	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need.	Community need comprises < 2% of approvals (i.e., 98% of decisions do not diminish suitability of land for agriculture).	Community need comprises < 2 per cent of approvals.	Community need comprises < 2 per cent of approvals.	Community need comprises < 2per cent of approvals.

Goal 2: *A land use framework that encourages and enables farming.*

The land use framework for agriculture includes the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, local government land use plans and by-laws, and the legislation, plans and policies of other ministries and agencies that affect agricultural land use.

The ALR is a working agricultural land base. The utilization of the ALR for agricultural production contributes to the economy, stabilizes rural communities and provides a safe and secure food supply. The Commission shares the responsibility for encouraging farm use of agricultural lands with its key partners. These include 134 local governments, the agricultural sector and its professional organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, other ministries and agencies, Agriculture Canada and other federal agencies, and some First Nations.

Objective: *Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming.*

To contribute to the success of the agricultural sector, the Commission works to ensure that its plans and policies and those of its key partners permit and enable the use of the ALR for agriculture. The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve this objective:

- The publication of guidelines to assist local governments and other agencies with land use responsibilities to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging and enabling farming is addressed by their plans and policies; and
- The selective audit of local government official community plans to determine consistency with the guidelines, legislation and regulations. The Commission is working towards results-based processes and has established guidelines to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging farming is addressed by jurisdictions with land use responsibilities.

Performance Measures:

The change in the number of local government official community plans that are consistent with the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and with the Commission's guidelines is an indicator of the Commission's success in working with others to encourage, enable and accommodate farming. The Commission is moving from reviewing all plans and by-laws of local government to a risk-based program of comprehensive audits of a sample of plans with ALR. Local government plans are evaluated to determine their consistency with the *Act* and Commission guidelines and the degree to which they encourage farming in the ALR. The Commission expects the number of plans that effectively encourage farming will increase over time, with a specific target to be established after a baseline is determined.

The Commission, along with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries also encourages local governments to adopt agricultural area plans that support agriculture. An increase in the number of plans adopted is another indicator of the Commission and ministry's success in encouraging, enabling and accommodating farming. For this measure, the 2004/05 base and targets have been modified from last year's Service Plan based on improved information.

Performance Measures	2004/05 Actual/Base	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
Per cent of local government official community plans that encourage and enable agriculture.	Completion of audit plan and establish baseline by start of fiscal (April 2005).	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development).	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development).	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development).
Number of agricultural area plans.	12	14	16	18

Related Initiatives and Planning Processes

Deregulation and Regulatory Reform

The table below lists the Commission's most significant deregulation and regulatory reform initiatives.

Objective	Performance Measures	2004/05 Actual/Base	2005/06 Target	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target
Evaluate the impact of the shift to results-based regulation. ¹	Evaluation of impacts of fill/soil deposit deregulation. Evaluation of oil and gas uses/impacts.	Results from 2005 audits. Results from 2005 audits.	To be determined.		
Streamline application processing through deregulation.	Processing time for applications.	86 per cent of applications decided within 90 days (estimate).	80 per cent of applications decided within 90 days.		
Zero per cent increase to regulatory burden throughout 2005/06.	Regulatory requirements maintained at June 2004 baseline.	223	0 per cent	0 per cent	0 per cent

¹ Deregulation efforts include (a) the repeal of the *Soil Conservation Act* in 2002 in favour of a regulatory requirement for notification of the placement of fill or removal of soil, and (b) the delegation of ALC authority to approve certain applications to the Oil and Gas Commission in 2004. These changes will be evaluated to determine their impact on the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Overviews of Human Resource Plan and Information Resource Management Plan

The Agricultural Land Commission Human Resources Plan overview is available on the Commission website at:

<http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/relatedplanningprocesses/overview.html>.

The Agricultural Land Commission Information Resource Management Plan is available on the Commission website at:

<http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/relatedplanningprocesses/overview.html>.